



ESTRELLA BELLA.

J. Gould and H. C. Richter del et lith.

Hallman & Walton Imp.

ESTREDA BELLA.

Fire-tailed Finch.

Loxia bella, Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. xlv.

Black-lined Grosbeak, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 198.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. v. p. 267.

Fringilla bella, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 257.

Wee-bong, Aborigines of New South Wales.

Fire-tail, Colonists of Van Diemen's Land.

VAN DIEMEN'S LAND may be considered the stronghold of this species, for it is universally and numerously dispersed over all parts of that island suited to its habits and economy. It also inhabits New South Wales, but is there far less abundant than in other districts. I generally observed it in small communities varying from six to a dozen in number, searching on the ground for the seeds of grasses and other small plants which grow on the plains and open parts of the forest. It also frequents the gardens and pleasure-grounds of the settlers, with whom it is a favourite, few birds being more tame or more beautifully coloured than this little Finch; the brilliant scarlet of the rump, and the base of the tail-feathers strongly contrasting with the more sombre hue of the body. Its flight is extremely rapid and arrow-like, particularly when crossing a plain or passing down a gully. It is a stationary species in Van Diemen's Land, and probably also in New South Wales. In the former country I constantly encountered it breeding, my attention being usually attracted by the enormous nest which it builds, and which, being placed among the branches of shrubby trees without the slightest attempt at concealment, is very conspicuous. It moreover breeds in small communities, several nests about ten inches in diameter being placed on the same tree. They are constructed entirely of grasses and stalks of plants, dome-shaped in form, with a hole near the top for the ingress and egress of the bird. The eggs are five or six in number, rather lengthened in form and of a beautiful flesh-white, eight and a half lines long by six and a half lines broad. It breeds from September to January, during which period two or three broods are reared. Its note is a single mournful sound emitted while perched on the low branches of the trees in the neighbourhood of its feeding-places.

The sexes present no external difference, and may be thus described:—circle surrounding the eyes, lores, and a line crossing the forehead black; all the upper surface, wings and tail olive-brown, crossed by numerous narrow crescentic lines of black; rump and base of the tail-feathers shining scarlet; all the under surface grey, crossed by numerous narrow crescentic lines of black; centre of the abdomen and under tail-coverts black; tips of the primaries and tail-feathers brown without bars; bill crimson, becoming paler at the base of the upper mandible; irides very dark brown; eyelash beautiful light blue; feet flesh-colour.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size.